

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

Kallman (202) 343-3171

For Release March 12, 1981

WATT OUTLINES "GOOD NEIGHBOR" POLICY FOR LAND MANAGEMENT IN ALASKA

Interior Secretary James Watt asked Alaskans today to join his Department in implementing the new Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act and in developing balanced management policies for the largest State's 70 million acres of multiple-use federally owned lands.

"I think it's time to put all past differences aside and move forward as good neighbors who work together for the benefit of all concerned," Watt said in a meeting with Alaska's Congressional delegation and Governor.

Watt said he agreed wholeheartedly with Alaska officials that top priority must be given to conveyances of Federal lands to the State and to the Alaska Native populations, under the new law and the Statehood Act and Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. The process of completing transfer of 103 million acres to the State and 44 million acres to the Indian, Eskimo and Aleut populations will be facilitated under the 1980 Act, which was signed into law last December following years of uncertainty over the future of enormous blocks of land.

Watt said as a result of consultation with Governor Hammond, Senator Stevens, Senator Murkowski, Representative Young, and Lieutenant Governor Miller, the following specific actions would be taken giving Interior a new direction in Alaska and a commitment to work with State interests:

- (1) Notice will appear shortly in the Federal Register formally rescinding all executive withdrawals made by the previous Administration during 1978 and 1980, as was provided by the terms of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act.
- (2) Land conveyance to the State and Natives will be expedited, with sufficient staff and funds requested of Congress so as to transfer 13.5 million acres during fiscal year 1982--9 million acres to the State and 4.5 million to the Natives.
- (3) The Secretary is directing that the lead agency within Interior for the oil and gas studies mandated by the Lands Act on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge will be the U.S. Geological Survey instead of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Both agencies will have active roles in these studies of the area's oil and gas potential and its wildlife populations.
- (4) The Secretary is directing the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to begin work on eliminating "emergency" withdrawal orders dating back to the early 1970's, many of them based on Section 17(d)(1) of the Native Claims Settlement Act.

(5) The Interior Department Solicitor is being directed to review the pending State litigation against Interior (including that based on the 1978 national monument designations and subsequent withdrawals for wildlife refuges), with a view toward seeking out-of-court agreements to settle the cases.

(6) BLM is also being directed to cease work on any Alaska wilderness surveys under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act.

(7) Also expedited will be the Bureau of Land Management's oil and gas leasing program on Federal lands in Alaska outside the North Slope, as mandated by the new Lands Act.

(8) The Secretary determined that it is inappropriate to presently pursue the caribou treaty with Canada which was proposed in 1980. In addition, he affirmed the State's right to manage taking of wolves on BLM administered lands in Alaska.

"In addition, it is also vital that the people most affected by Federal policies in Alaska have an important role in the development of those policies, the Interior Secretary said. "I intend to make sure that is what happens in the years ahead."

Watt said it is important to all Americans that Alaska's great wild areas and vast resources be managed in an orderly way, adding, "That includes orderly and balanced development of vitally needed resources--to forestall the plunder that would result if another major oil or mineral shortage put the country in the grip of a crisis mentality."

The Secretary announced his intention to appoint William P. Horn as Deputy Under Secretary of the Interior, with responsibility for coordinating implementation of the many complex features of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act. Horn served for the past four years as a consultant on Alaska lands to the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee.

"I have told Bill Horn and others with responsibilities under this new law that its implementation is not to create an oppressive Federal presence in Alaska," Watt said.

"I am directing that in our regulations and other management policies under the Act, we seek to avoid creation of a 'permit lifestyle' which burdens people with unreasonable paperwork requirements. The history of the Act is replete with assurances that Congress wants the people of Alaska to continue their traditional activities with a minimum of interference. I intend to honor those promises," said Watt.

"I am also fully cognizant of the State's expressed policy regarding the Lands Act, and our people are being directed to consider the State's position in our implementation of the Act, to foster good-neighbor relations with Alaska and its people," he said.

x x x